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Abstract ESC 2009

Negotiating Research Relationships: undertaking fieldwork with sex offenders and probation staff

In this presentation I will explore the challenges I faced when undertaking ethnographic fieldwork with sex offenders and staff within a Probation Approved Premises (hostel) in Wales, UK. The fieldwork involved participant observation of interactions between sex offenders, other offenders and staff in the hostel as well as interviews with all these groups over 2 years.

Key to this presentation is a consideration of formal and informal gatekeepers to study sites and participants, and how rapport can be problematic in this context. In particular, the issues raised by research relationships are discussed in respect to how access was gained and how the site and the people who took part in the research were left at the end of the fieldwork. Additionally, the relationships between the researcher and gatekeepers are related to the development and progression of the fieldwork and the nature of data collected. It is concluded that negotiating access is different to gaining entry to a research site, and that these negotiations include considerations of the relationships between the researcher, the research and the researched.